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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF HOME ECONOMICS
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HOW TO PREPARE RAW WOOL AT HOME FOR BEDDING^{1/}

Raw wool can be scoured (cleaned) and carded at home for comforters and mattresses. However, the process requires care and patience and should be undertaken only if large quantities of soft water^{2/} are available and when considerable time can be given to the work. Under such conditions, if the wool is on hand and cannot be sold to advantage, this is often an economical and good way to use it. The best results are obtained if only small amounts of wool are worked with at one time.

About 3 pounds of washed and carded wool are needed for a medium-sized comforter, and 20 to 50 pounds for a mattress. Comforts containing a thin layer of wool are also useful. They are warm, light in weight, and can often be used in place of blankets. When calculating the amount of raw wool needed for any purpose, assume that it will be reduced 45 to 65 per cent in weight by the scouring and carding.

PREPARATION FOR SCOURING

A broad wooden paddle with several holes bored in it is helpful in handling the wet wool. Clean boards put together in the sun and covered with clean sheets or other white cloth make a good drying platform. Faster drying is obtained if the boards are placed 2 or 3 inches apart on wooden horses so air can circulate through the wool.

Make a stock soap solution by heating slowly 1 pound of sal-soda and 2 pounds of a good neutral soap (not strong laundry soap) in 2 gallons of soft water, and filling up to 5 gallons.

At least three suds and as many rinses will be needed to clean the wool. Arrange wash tubs or large pails and a clothes wringer so that the wool can be passed readily from one to the other. If it is possible to keep the water warm, make three tubs of suds before beginning to wash the wool. For the first suds, dilute 1 to 2 quarts of the stock soap solution with 10 gallons of water. This suds should be hot enough to be uncomfortable but bearable to the hand (about 120° F.). The second and third suds should be a little cooler (110° - 120° F.) and contain less soap, depending on the condition of the wool. If the wool is very dirty, additional suds will be needed. If it is in exceptionally good condition, the sal-soda may be used only in the first suds, and a stock solution of soap alone made up for the second and third suds. The soda is needed to cut the grease, but will harm the wool after the protective grease coating has been removed.

1/ See also Methods of Wool Scouring Suggested for Sheep Husbandry Investigators. Multigraphed. J. I. Hardy. Bureau of Animal Industry, U. S. Dept. of Agr. 1927.

2/ For methods of softening water see Farmstead Water Supply. George M. Warren. U. S. Dept. of Agr. Farmers' Bul. 1448. 1925.

SCOURING

Select only the cleanest of the fleece. Pick it apart, shaking out all the dirt possible. Remove all tags and dung locks. Wool that is stained will not scour white. Put only a small quantity of wool into the suds at a time. The best results are obtained if about 6 gallons of suds are used for each pound of raw wool. Never crowd the wool in the tubs. Scour in several lots, if necessary, rather than damage it in cleaning. Handle the wet wool with the paddle, keeping the wool below the surface until it is thoroughly soaked with suds. Allow it to stand in the suds for about 10 minutes and avoid stirring or squeezing, as this causes matting. For the same reason, do not use a washing machine. Lift up small amounts, let the water drain out, and put the wool through a clothes wringer. Repeat this process in all the suds. Rinse at least three times in soft water of the same temperature as the last suds (110° - 120° F.), handling the wool as before. Adding 1 to 2 pints of vinegar to the last rinse helps to remove the last traces of soap. Spread thinly on the drying boards and dry thoroughly before using.

CARDING

Use wool cards, which may be bought from mail order houses for about \$1.00 per pair, to straighten out the washed wool and to remove the smaller bits of chaff and other foreign matter. Carding wool by hand is a slow process. A few mills do "custom carding" at a reasonable cost and return the straightened fibers in large sheets. The same mills also accept small quantities of customers' wool in exchange for finished blankets. A list of these firms will be furnished upon request.

TO MAKE WOOL BATTS FOR COMFORTERS AND MATTRESSES

For comforters, spread the washed and carded wool on the floor on a paper 18 inches wide and as long as the desired length of the comforter. Arrange a layer of wool 1 or 2 inches thick on the paper, cover with paper and repeat until there are four layers. Place a clean board 18 inches wide and the length of the layers of wool on top, and weight down with 200 pounds or more. Press for 2 or 3 days.

If the batts are to be used for mattresses, make a box 18 inches wide, 12 inches deep and the length of the mattress, or use one corner of a room and two boards the necessary width and length. Line with paper. Spread the carded wool in layers 4 or 5 inches thick, using a layer of paper between each layer of wool. Repeat until the box is filled. Cover and weight as described above.

Each layer of wool makes one batt. Remove the board and roll up each layer without removing the paper. These batts will remain in good condition until used, if protected from moths.^{3/}

^{3/} See Clothes Moths and Their Control. E. A. Back. U. S. Dept. of Agr. Farmers' Bul. 1353. 1931.